

Short devotional – Who Needs Proverbs?

Here is a suggestion for a short devotional topic for introducing Proverbs and encouraging engagement. Adapt to suit your audience.

OPEN IN PRAYER

How many of us remember studying the book of Proverbs as a child? How many of us here in this room read Proverbs or were asked to memorize portions of Proverbs by our parents?

Proverbs is an especially appropriate group of passages for parents and children to memorize together. It even has this relationship embedded into the text:

Proverbs 1:8 “Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching.”

Childhood is the classroom of our lives—it is a time full of instructions and lessons. It makes sense that the book of Proverbs, full of instructions and advice, starts out with a greeting to the author's own son.

Sometimes, though, we might be tempted to view the book of Proverbs as a book primarily for children. Because of the many references to “my son,” we might assume that it's a book to focus on when you are young and then graduate from at a later date.

We can see that this definitely isn't the case. If we want to know what kind of people benefit from and need Proverbs, we can look at the very beginning, where God tells us the purpose of this book: (verses 2 to 5)

- 2 To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
- 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
- 4 to **give prudence to the simple**,
knowledge and discretion to the **youth**—
- 5 Let **the wise** hear and increase in learning,
and **the one who understands** obtain guidance,

Yes, **proverbs are for those of us who are young, and those of us who are “simple”**—in need of training and knowledge.

But these proverbs are also written directly for **those who have already lived and matured and acquired some wisdom**. We are never too old for the book of Proverbs. In fact, those who are wise—the ones we might expect to be *writing* the proverbs, are described as benefitting from Proverbs (v 5). Studying and learning from Proverbs doesn't indicate a lack of maturity. Even the wise will continue to learn from this book, being reminded of truth and even *increasing* in understanding.

However, there are some people who cannot benefit from Proverbs. Who are they?

We might assume that Proverbs was written for fools so that they could become wise, but Proverbs has a different explanation. Let's look now towards the end of the book to see a warning about the use of proverbs:

Fools and Proverbs: Prov 26:7–9

Like a lame man's legs, which hang useless,
is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

Like one who binds the stone in the sling
is one who gives honor to a fool.

Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard
is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

Let's take a moment and look at these verses because it is an **important message** for us as we start out. It also provides a **great example** of how to study and understand Proverbs.

Notice the poetic symbolism here—it provides a picture, a bit of a story. The poetry of Proverbs often helps us to see how foolish something is by comparing it to something else.

Let's look at all of these parts and see what kind of story God is telling. These pictures give us a lot of opportunities for meditation.

7 Like a lame man's **legs**, which hang **useless**,
is a **proverb** in the mouth of fools.

8 Like **one** who **binds the stone in the sling**
is **one** who **gives honor to a fool**.

9 Like a **thorn** that goes up **into the hand** of a drunkard
is a **proverb** in the mouth of fools.

Structure:

1. Each of these forms a **parallel structure**. This is a common feature of Hebrew poetry, and it's a powerful way that God helps us to understand and remember these truths. The parallelism of Hebrew poetry makes it easier for us to memorize. It also aids our understanding. We can see how this commonly works by seeing the parallelism back in the first passage we read: (Proverbs 1:4)

4 to **give prudence to the simple**,
knowledge and discretion to the **youth**—

The poetic structure gives us two ideas that are parallel—structurally they are nearly identical, highlighting their similarities. We can see that prudence is connected to knowledge and discretion. It is not synonymous to knowledge, but they are closely related. In the same way, we can see that “the simple” are similar in many ways to “the youth”—both are untrained. But they are not identical either. These parallel structures give us a chance to meditate on the similarities of these two parallel ideas while also thinking through how the ideas build on each other and give more details. Here, it shows us in detail the benefits of God's wisdom and the purpose of the book of Proverbs.

2. These three proverbs also **form a set**. The first and final parts are parallel, giving us more details about the dangers of fools using and applying proverbs in foolish ways. These two similar verses form book ends around the middle verse, which is more challenging to understand. They give context to it, assisting us in our interpretation.

As we study Proverbs, we should be looking for these structures to help us understand.

Symbolism:

***legs:** Proverbs are meant to take us somewhere; they are very practical for life.

***drunkard:** Senseless, doesn't know how to grab something safely; he causes harm to himself.

(It can also be helpful to see *other translations*: NLT “A proverb in the mouth of a fool is like a thorny branch brandished by a drunk” ... This translation takes this complex poetry and emphasizes the harm that the fool can cause to others.)

***stone** in the sling (slingshot): A powerful weapon at that time; super useful and effective But binding it is a ridiculous and useless action.

Message:

Our initial thought might be that *any* use of Proverbs is good, but God says otherwise.... He wants us to know that fools:

1. Can make a proverb **useless**
2. Are **senseless** when it comes to how to use wisdom
3. Can apply them in ways that are **harmful** and not beneficial

He also wants us to know that if we honour someone who abuses truth—uses it in a useless or even a harmful way—we become complicit in his act.

Proverbs require wisdom to apply! We may run to the book of Proverbs for wisdom, but, ironically, **these proverbs demand wisdom to apply them properly.**

So what should we do in order to approach the book of Proverbs wisely and not as fools?

1. PRAY: (James 1:5–8)
“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

We should pray to receive wisdom **from** them and **for** them. We should pray that we can use them for our good and not for harm.

2. START with a relationship with God.

The first chapter of Proverbs gives us **the key** to approaching Proverbs and the first step in understanding.

Do you already know what this key is? Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The first key to understanding wisdom is **a relationship.**

Fools don't recognize this, and they end up despising the very truth that could bring them life. Surprisingly, the type of person we might initially think of as needing Proverbs—the

Welcome & Wisdom from Abiding in Him

fool—is a person who cannot benefit from them **apart from a specific change in perspective.**

What words can we use for this “fear” of the LORD?

Respect, awe, reverence, recognition of His authority, etc.

Can we brainstorm this a bit? Why is this relationship with God the beginning, the necessary starting place for wisdom and knowledge?

In reality, we have to come to Proverbs with a certain recognition of who God is: He is the one who created us and the one who has authority in our lives. He is the author of truth, the Great Teacher.

He begins all life and wisdom with an invitation—an invitation to approach Him and be reconciled with Him. He made a way through Jesus Christ for us to be a part of His family and connected with Him for new life.

Today, let's start our study of Proverbs by running to God first, acknowledging Him as the King of all, and praying for His gift of wisdom. Then we will be in a position to grow in wisdom, no matter what our age or maturity level.